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ABSTRACT

Paraprofessional workers (teachers' aides) can help special needs students in vocational education classes. In order for them to function properly, they need supervision, which may vary among institutions, but should include some inservice orientation and training. Some of the topics that should be covered in the training of paraprofessionals include job role expectations; knowledge of handicaps and disadvantagement; behavioral management and physical control; observing, recording, and reporting student behavior; tutoring techniques; school policies; instructional materials and other resources; first aid and safety; legal and ethical issues; equipment operation and job-specific skills; and orientation to the school. Training activities should be conducted by teachers, principals, and counselors; they should include observation of classes, microteaching, and meetings between teachers and paraprofessionals. Finally, teachers must be aware of their "sacred space" and be willing to share responsibilities with their papraprofessionals when such sharing will benefit students with special needs. (KC)

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SUPERVISION OF PARAPROFESSIONAL WORKERS IN SPECIAL NEEDS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Recent legislation has created mandates and financial resources for providing supplemental services to handicapped and disadvantaged students in order to assist them in succeeding in their vocational training. As a means of providing these services, educational institutions are turning more to the assistance of paraprofessional workers. Many even find using paraprofessionals in class and shop areas to be a preferable alternative to providing learning centers for which students leave regular classes to receive assistance.

Paraprofessional workers, though, do not usually enter the schools with sufficient training. Buckbee stated that "they do not tend to have, when hired, the competencies necessary to assist vocational educators in the provision of supplemental services for students with unique learning problems" (1986, p. 61). This places special demands on those responsible for supervising the workers. This paper is intended to be a resource for those responsible for the supervision of paraprofessional workers in vocational education programs with special needs students.

Before beginning discussion on supervision, it is important to clarify two terms. The first is **paraprofessional**. A definition has been provided by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education and Related Services.

> A paraprofessional is a person: 1) whose position is either instructional in nature or who provides other direct or indirect services to students and or their parents; and 2) who serves in a position for which a teacher or another professional has the ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of individual education programs and related services. (Pickett, 1986, p. 33)

In addition to the term paraprofessional, these workers are also known by other terms such as **teacher's aides** and **instructional assistants**.

The second term, **supervision**, is one for which authors have provided differing definitions. Buckbee emphasizes control and considers it a "process of managing the paraprofessionals" in order to "provide monitoring for" their "effective and economical use" (1986, p. 60). Nielsen (1977) presents it merely as orientation and inservice training while Heller and Pickett (1983) are more general, portraying it as assistance in helping the paraprofessional to improve performance in an instructional setting. These differing views parallel those of supervision in education in general and imply that persons responsible for paraprofessional supervision on the local level have a variety of positions to consider when deciding on suitable approaches for their institutions. The position taken in this paper acknowledges that conditions and personalities in each institution determine the approach to be taken. Accordingly, the discussion presented builds upon different views throughout.

CONTENT OF TRAINING FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

To some extent, all three of the above views of supervision recognize that an important duty of the supervisor is to provide

orientation and inservice training for employees. A review of the literature provided a number of items to include as part of the content of training for paraprofessional workers (Burlington County College, 1980; Huggins, 1985; Lindsey, 1983; Nielsen, 1977; and especially Vasa, Steckelberg, and Ronning, 1982). Concepts, skills, and attitudes related to these items are discussed below.

Job Role Expectations As paraprofessionals begin the task of assisting students in their training, it is important that they have a clear idea of their duties and responsibilities. Because the funding for most paraprofessional workers is provided by government sources, it is important that the duties assigned are consistent with the funding requirements. Typically this means that the workers are assigned those tasks that provide direct and indirect assistance to special needs students who would not otherwise succeed in their training. Accordingly, duties such as providing regular maintenance of shop equipment, correcting tests and homework assignments of the class, and reproducing handouts for the class **cannot** be properly assigned to paraprofessionals because they are services that benefit the class as a whole and are not targeted toward special needs students specifically. Such duties and responsibilities that can be properly assigned to paraprofessionals have been outlined by Faucette (1980) and the Maryland State Department of Education (1984). These are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Duties and Responsibilities of Paraprofessional Workers

Assessment

Assist the vocational instructor in identifying students with special needs

Assist in administering assessment instruments

Assist in the identification and utilization of appropriate student learning preference styles

Review vocational evaluation results and assist in the implementation of recommendations

Classroom Instruction

Provide individual instruction, small group instruction, and remedial instruction outside and within the vocational classroom setting; may include pre-teaching and re-teaching lessons

Develop and/or assist students in using audiovisual instructional resources

Provide alternative procedures to meet individual test-taking styles (i.e. oral, "hands on")

Review test results and answers with students

Assist students in developing and using problem-solving techniques

Instruction in Shop and Lab Areas

Assist special needs students to learn how to properly operate the equipment and machinery used in the vocational class or training station

Check laboratory work including use of materials, equipment, & tools; and encourage accepted safety practices in students' work

Circulate in the classroom and see if students are completing their work; give help where needed

Work in specific skill areas with individuals

Teach students how to dress appropriately for their vocational areas

Affective Areas

Help the instructor maintain a pleasant, orderly atmosphere in the classroom

Help the instructor in problem areas such as dissension in the classroom, personality conflicts, and personal problems of the students

Table 1. (cont.)

Listen and talk quietly to a student who is upset or disturbing the classroom
Assist the students in realizing positive attitudes toward education in general and achieving success in a specific vocational program

Career Guidance
Monitor student progress and encourage positive worker traits (i.e. attendance, punctuality, attitude, independent work habits)
Encourage participation in vocational student organizations (VSOs)
Provide additional career information

Other Areas
Become knowledgeable of those academic skills necessary for achieving success in vocational training areas
Assist in administering pre-tests and post-tests to special needs students
Keep records of contacts with students, parents, instructors, and other school personnel
Perform other duties as identified by the vocational instructor, vocational facilitator, or coordinator

Knowledge of Handicaps and Disadvantagement Paraprofessional workers (as well as vocational instructors themselves!) typically do not have backgrounds that provide them with knowledge of the handicaps and disadvantagement of the special needs students for whom they provide support. They do not know, for example, how best to deal with a student who has dyslexia or who is emotionally disturbed. It is important to provide the workers with information that may equip them to serve these students in the best way possible. Numerous resources are available on these topics so they are not discussed in depth here. Appendix A is a suggested list of references.

Behavioral Management and Physical Control It is important for paraprofessional workers to learn effective means of dealing with students' behaviors. This includes concepts, skills, and attitudes that relate not only to disruptive behaviors of students but also to routine activity in the classroom and shop areas. Included with behavioral management are concepts, skills, and attitudes in general communications and interpersonal areas.

In addition to acquiring and maintaining proper concepts, skills, and attitudes concerning behavioral management, paraprofessionals also need to learn those that relate to physical control. Training may present state and local policies related to physical control and discipline alternatives.

Observing, Recording, and Reporting Student Behavior Proper record keeping is an important part of paraprofessionals' duties in many institutions. One key to good records is making a distinction between facts and conclusions. For example, to make the statement, "John is lazy," is not nearly as meaningful as stating, "During the week of October 18, John was late for class four times, and on six different occasions I had to remind him before he began work on his project in the shop." Observing, recording, and reporting factual information affords greater opportunities to acknowledge positive student behaviors and attitudes, provide a means for correcting undesirable behaviors and attitudes, and provide information helpful in diagnosing student needs.

Tutoring Techniques It is likely that paraprofessional workers will spend much, if not most, of their time in tutoring activities. Because

of this, it is especially important that they have effective tutoring skills. Some keys to effective tutoring are the ability to 1) identify important learning goals; 2) identify specific student needs related to those goals; 3) explain and/or demonstrate concepts, skills, and attitudes clearly; 4) utilize appropriate feedback to students; and 5) evaluate students on the ability to demonstrate the concepts, skills, and attitudes **independently** as final outcomes related to the original goals. Although the paraprofessional may guide or coach a student to assist in the learning process, it is important that the student learn to accomplish the task independently as the final outcome. Also, those acting as tutors should focus attention on the **students'** demonstration of concepts, skills, and attitudes rather than on their own presentations of them.

School Policies Training for paraprofessionals should include information on school policies. These may include record keeping, student discipline, work schedules, procedures for sick call-off, and general guidelines for student responsibilities and behaviors such as may be available in a student handbook.

Instructional Materials and Other Resources In order to be most helpful to special needs students, paraprofessional personnel should be familiar with the instructional materials and other resources - including the content of classrooom presentations - used in the vocational training programs. Learning assistance will be most effective when it is related to the previously established components of the training. Although paraprofessionals may feel very confident about their particular ways of presenting concepts, skills, and attitudes, it

will help the students to refer to the established components of the training during these presentations.

First Aid and Safety First aid and safety issues are probably more important for vocational training than for academic classrooms. Such training should include general first aid as well as first aid and safety information about particular equipment and chemicals related to the specific vocational areas with which the paraprofessional will be working.

Legal and Ethical Issues Paraprofessionals should be made aware of legal and ethical issues related to public education. Included among these are confidentiality and rights of learners and parents or guardians.

Equipment Operation and Job Specific Skills Many paraprofessional personnel have been hired specifically because of their experience in a particular vocational area. However, information regarding equipment operation and skills specific to vocational areas should be included in training not only for those who are unfamiliar with the vocational areas but also for those whose information may be outdated.

Local Institution Training should include orientation to the specific institution in which the paraprofessional will be working. This includes a tour of the facilities, introductions to other staff members and presentation of the institution's organizational hierarchy.

NATURE OF TRAINING FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Educators have put forth significant efforts to base their program offerings to students on concepts such as individualized instruction and competency based education. These approaches acknowledge that not all individuals learn at the same rate or by the same means and emphasize that it is the ability to perform certain functions that is the ultimate goal of many types of training. It is important that the way training is delivered to staff members also make use of these ideas. Information concerning the nature of training for paraprofessionals has been provided by Lindsey (1983) and Nielsen (1977).

Lindsey discussed the types of activities that can be conducted as part of training. He supports involving other school staff such as instructors, principals, and counselors in some training activities. This provides the opportunity not only to present information about students and their needs but also to help paraprofessional personnel become acquainted with other staff members. Other activities were directed specifically to paraprofessionals. These include observation of classes in session and supervised teaching experiences. Lindsey discussed the use micro-teaching and micro-diagnostic experiences. During these, the paraprofessional would conduct a brief teaching or diagnostic activity such as might be part of the routine responsibilities at the institution. The complete learning activity would include assistance from a trained professional in preparing for the session, the actual performance of the teaching or diagnostic

session, and analysis and evaluation of it. Videotaping may be used to aid in the analysis and evaluation of the session.

Nielsen lised the following guide points for orientation and inservice training.

a. Start with what the aide actually knows now and build on it.
b. Teach only so much at a time.
c. Use practice and repetition to help achieve proficiency.
d. Demonstrate and illustrate.
e. Make allowances for INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES.
f. Create a feeling of confidence in the aide.
g. Allow the aide freedom to make mistakes.
h. Make sure the aide knows what is expected on him/her.
i. FOLLOW-UP inservice to see if the aide understands.
j. Use a VARIETY of presentation methods with an individual or group.
k. Periodically REVIEW and EVALUATE the supervision that is provided for the aide.
l. TEACHERS should receive inservice training which would:
   - Detail the assignment of the aide.
   - Emphasize acceptance of aides.
   - Stress communication with the aide.
   - Provide for teacher-aide instructional teams. (pp.18-19)

As demonstrated by both of these authors, it is important to establish a positive relationship among the paraprofessionals and the instructors with whom they will be working. It is important to schedule meetings where paraprofessionals and teachers can meet on a face-to-face basis to discuss guidelines for the use of the paraprofessional in the classroom and to orient the paraprofessional to the teacher's approach to learning. This is also an opportune time to reassure the teacher that the assignment of an aide to the classroom is not an indication of substandard teaching in the class but is rather an acknowledgement of the nature of the special needs of the students.

SACRED SPACE AND SUPERVISION

Just as affective concerns enter into discussion on teaching students, so do they enter into discussion on supervision of paraprofessional workers. One means for discussing these concerns is to base it on **sacred space** of those involved in education. Sacred space can be thought of as the limitations people put on what they allow to be questioned or examined regarding their services to students. This may include what an individual perceives to be critical aspects of teaching to which there is a deep personal and emotional commitment. Such a commitment is not necessarily founded on thorough reasoning nor does it necessarily represent a comprehensive view of teaching and learning. When a person's sacred space includes critical aspects, there is a tendency to become defensive whenever that person perceives that these aspects are being questioned by others. Also, these aspects are issues for which people will quickly "get on their soapboxes" to advocate.

Concerns of sacred space are an important part of supervision of paraprofessional personnel in that they relate to those responsible for supervising paraprofessional workers, to classroom teachers, and to paraprofessionals themselves. Supervisors of paraprofessionals must have a view a teaching and learning that is comprehensive and has been thoroughly examined so that they can provide assistance to paraprofessionals. Those responsible for supervision must be well aware of their own sacred space so they do not allow it to unnecessarily interfere with working with the paraprofessional.

Instructors to whose classes paraprofessional workers are assigned are also likely to have a sacred space that has the potential to interfere with working cooperatively with an aide. Raising their awareness of their space (when it becomes an issue) should help them to be more tolerable of behaviors and attitudes of paraprofessionals that may interfere with what they consider to be "sacred." In some cases, an instructor's space may be so "sacred" that it is counterproductive to assign a paraprofessional to that classroom.

Because paraprofessionals are less likely than their supervisors or regular vocational teachers to have professional training in education, the issue of sacred space is perhaps more critical for them than for other staff members. Their lack of training leaves personal experience as the major basis for their beliefs about teaching and learning. Implications of this are that their supervisors need to help paraprofessionals broaden their views of teaching and learning (and thus give them a means for decreasing the size of their sacred space) and that the supervisors need to be aware that building a high level of trust will encourage paraprofessional personnel to allow someone else to enter that space.

CANDIDATES FOR PARAPROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

Those responsible for supervising paraprofessional personnel are usually responsible for hiring them as well. The following are suggested resources for identifying potential applicants for the positions. Many senior citizen centers have a component to help their

clientele to be placed in jobs. This may be a good resource since some of these people may have retired from jobs where they have extensive experience in vocational areas. Also, some senior citizens have maximum limitations on their incomes so the limited wages that are offered are not a deterent to them. A second resource is higher education institutions that provide certification for regular vocational teachers. Often such institutions will have information concerning people who are seeking positions in vocational education. Finally, former vocational students may also be candidates for paraprofessional positions.

Currently most states require no certification for paraprofessional personnel. Some vocational education practitioners, though, have hinted that certification may be of assistance in making hiring decisions for these positions. Although certification is not presently required, some higher education institutions have established training programs such as those leading to associate degrees for people interested in working as paraprofessional personnel.

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APPENDIX A

SUGGESTED REFERENCES FOR CHARACTERISTICS OF HANDICAPS AND DISADVANTAGEMENT

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